

FIVE-FIVE-FIVE ALIVE!

AN INVITATION TO A RULE OF LIFE

*Six Weeks of Daily Readings and Reflections Inviting Anglicans to
Design and Adopt a Personal “Rule of Life”*



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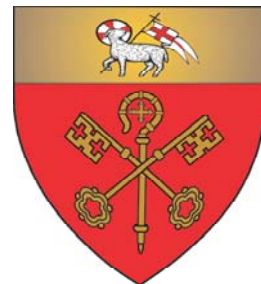


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Daily Opening Prayer:

Why not begin with the *Kyrie*? Note how this always commences times of prayer in the *Book of Common Prayer*.¹

**Lord, have mercy upon us;
Christ, have mercy upon us;
Lord, have mercy upon us.**

(Or in its ecumenical contemporary form:

Lord, have mercy; Christ, have mercy; Lord, have mercy.)

This is actually a threefold appeal to God the Trinity for his aid in our prayers or worship. (See its expansion to a full “O God the Father/Son/Holy Spirit... have mercy upon us” in the Great Litany, *BCP* page 30.)

As we say this *Kyrie*, we may appeal, in each consecutive petition:

- in wonder and praise to *the Lord*, the Father above and beyond us;
- then in trust to *Christ*, i.e., God the Son, who shared our humanity, understands our weakness, and who prays with us and beside us;
- and then in supplication to “*the Lord*”, the Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 3: 17), within and about us, enabling us to pray (Romans 8: 26-27).

Countless spiritual directors and other commentators have commended this practice, perhaps even praying it repeatedly, as a way of commencing or focusing our attention in prayer.

¹ (Cf. Morning and Evening Prayer, *BCP* pages 10 and 23; Holy Communion, p. 70; Matrimony, p. 569; Thanksgiving after Childbirth, p. 574; Ministry to the Sick, p. 576; Burial of the Dead, p. 598; Penitential Service, p. 612; Service for Young People, p. 624; and pages 635, 669, etc.)

Five-Five-Five Alive!

A Guideline for Following Jesus

At our Orientation Session in the autumn of 2011, some of the members of the newly appointed Spiritual Development Team of Diocesan Council were asked to set some goals for the three years leading up to the next Synod. All who were present quickly agreed that active Anglican Christians in the Diocese of Fredericton were already overwhelmed with meetings, workshops and programs aimed at our spiritual development and daily discipleship. We agreed that rather than one more event or program, what was needed was a way to encourage Anglicans to each review and renew our personal daily discipleship, with an eye to being ever more faithful to Christ and his Way as we receive his grace, worship his Father and grow in his Spirit.

We quickly focused upon a neglected resource that all Anglicans would find as easily accessible as it was beneficial, the invitation on page 555 at the end of the Catechism in the *Book of Common Prayer* urging “Every Christian man or woman... from time to time” to “frame for himself (or herself) a RULE OF LIFE in accordance with the precepts of the Gospel and the faith and order of the Church.”

We may have heard of this succinct guideline for discipleship when we were prepared for Confirmation, or attended a Cursillo Weekend. Some of us may have heard our minister preach on its wisdom. Others have been inspired by the Benedictine Rule, the Rules of other Christian communities, or one of the many “rules for life” from Christians and others that we find in books or on the internet. However we have received an invitation to be attentive and disciplined in our Christian faith and life, we can all benefit from a time of reflecting on the different dimensions of our walk with Christ, and newly committing ourselves to more intentionality in our spiritual practices.

The Spiritual Development Team offers this resource to our diocese as one important way to experience the renewal in mission and worship mandated by the “*Nicodemus Project*”. Our diocese will not begin to grow unless we are renewed by God’s Holy Spirit. Our “spirituality” is an essential element in this quest for the making of new disciples in our challenging time.

I personally thank my wife Valda, and the Vestry of the Parish of Lancaster, for allowing me a week of retreat in October, 2012, in order to prepare this booklet; and my sister, Maureen McMullen of Lakelands, N.S., for her generous hospitality in allowing me to enjoy the beautiful quietness of her cottage on Lilly Lake, N.S., as I wrote this booklet. The Ven. Keith Joyce helped me with wise editing suggestions. My prayer is that everyone who uses this booklet will find their relationship with God deepened, and their spirituality renewed, as has happened to me as I consciously embraced the invitation and discipline of “the Anglican Way”.

***--The Rev’d Chris McMullen,
Trinity XX and XXI, 2012.***

An Invitation to a Rule of Life

**“Question: What is the vocation
of a Christian in this world?**

**“Answer: To follow Christ and bear witness to him;
to fight the good fight of faith
and lay hold on eternal life.**

* * * *

**“Every Christian man or woman should from
time to time frame for himself¹ a RULE OF LIFE
in accordance with the precepts of the Gospel
and the faith and order of the Church;
wherein he¹ may consider the following:**

- (1) The regularity of his¹ attendance at public worship
and especially at the holy Communion.**
- (2) The practice of private prayer, Bible-reading,
and self-discipline.**
- (3) Bringing the teaching and example of Christ
into his¹ everyday life.**
- (4) The boldness of his¹ spoken witness
to his faith in Christ.**
- (5) His¹ personal service
to the Church and the community.**
- (6) The offering of money according to his¹ means
for the support of the work of the Church
at home and overseas.”**

--Book of Common Prayer (Canada, 1962), page 555.

¹ *(Our apologies for the exclusiveness of the historic language.)*

Week One:

Introduction and

Sharing in Public Worship and Holy Communion

Monday in Week One:

Each day we will read a portion of Holy Scripture, using it to hear God's word to us about living as followers of Jesus. We will end with a prayer. We should also begin with a brief time of focusing on God in prayer. (You may wish to begin by praying the *Kyrie*, following the directions on the inside cover below the Table of Contents.) Today please read: **Genesis 15: 1-21.**

The Bible's story of faith begins with Abraham and Sarah (*Genesis 15:6*). God had made Abraham (originally named "Abram") a promise that through his progeny, all the people of the world would be blessed (*Gen. 12: 2-3*). To get the fulfilling of that promise started, they were to leave security behind and become pilgrims in the Promised Land. They were to adopt a lifestyle of faith and hope! We might call this a "spirituality" or a "Rule of Life". This opened their lives to a partnership with God, in God's great plan, eventually realized in their descendent Jesus, to redeem the human family.

We can be befuddled by customs in the Bible that were very meaningful to the people in their culture, but now seem odd to us. In today's reading, Abram is told not to be afraid, for his "reward will be very great" (*Gen. 15:1*). But he needs reassurance (*15:2*). He is asking for help for his faith in God. For this help to be real for Abraham, it would have to be experienced in a way that was meaningful to him. God accepts us and works with us as we are. So God commands Abraham to prepare a display of cut-up sacrifices. In his day, people would walk between such slain carcasses to give a bloody surety to their oath. God lovingly condescends to guarantee his promise to Abraham in this gruesome yet mystical experience.

The Catechism in the *Book of Common Prayer Canada* concludes with an invitation to personalize our faith, with a six-fold "Rule of Life" (*see Page 2*). That is a disciplined offering of our own suitable preparations and sacrifices, by which we become open to God's presence, and grow to better trust in him. A "Rule of Life", personally designed for our lives, will help us to be prepared to experience God.

Prayer:

**Prevent us, O Lord, in all our doings
With Thy most gracious favour,
and further us with Thy continual help;
That in all our works,
Begun, continued, and ended in Thee,
We may glorify Thy holy Name,
And finally by Thy mercy obtain everlasting life;
Through Jesus Christ our Lord.**

(BCP pages 87-88, and 644, 656, 667)

Tuesday in Week One:

Begin with a time of quiet focusing on God in prayer.

Then read: **Exodus 20: 1-17.**

After five centuries of ups and downs, Abraham's descendants, the Israelites, found themselves in slavery. Yet that was all part of God's plan for the redemption of the world. Moses is rescued from infanticide to grow up in Pharaoh's palace, equipped to lead the people of Israel to freedom. After being rescued from the Egyptians at the Red Sea, they were guided to Mount Sinai, to receive God's commandments for a holy people, set free and set apart for God's own purpose. "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of ... slavery. You shall have no other gods before me!" They were to worship, trust and obey no other "god" or power, than this God who sets them free. The Exodus is a foreshadowing of our full redemption in Christ.

The Invitation to a Rule of Life in the Prayer Book tells us, first, to adopt a *"regularity of... attendance at public worship and especially at the Holy Communion."* This is to promote and preserve the spiritual identity and freedom we receive from our redemption in Christ. Our Christian faith is personal but not private. Ours is a conviction, experience and vocation that must be shared with all of God's people. It is together with those people that we may best offer our worship and learn about God's will for us.

The Ten Commandments are themselves a kind of "Rule of Life" for Israel. These commandments are reaffirmed, deepened, and commended to Christians in the New Testament (*Luke 18: 20; Romans 13: 9-10*). (The Fourth, keeping a Sabbath, is qualified and given a new meaning: *Matthew 12: 12; Luke 6: 5; Colossians 2: 16-17, Hebrews 4: 3-11*). The heart of the "Old Covenant" with Israel, they inform the "New Covenant" sealed in Christ's blood as well (*Luke 22:20*).

The first four commandments directly fashion our relationship with God: (1) Who we worship exclusively; (2) How we avoid any over-simplifications of God's greatness; (3) How God's name is to be hallowed and honoured, and (4) How we may find rest and renewal in him. Public worship is a vital, regular way to begin each week by putting God first in our lives.

Prayer:

**Lord God our Redeemer,
Who heard the cry of your people
And sent your servant Moses
To lead them out of slavery:
Free us from the tyranny of sin and death,
And by the leading of your Spirit
Bring us to our promised land,
Through Jesus Christ our Lord
Who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
One God, now and forever. Amen.**

(Book of Alternative Services Proper 30, page 388)

Wednesday in Week One:

Begin with a time of quiet focusing on God in prayer.

Then read: **Deuteronomy 8: 7—19.**

At the end of a forty-year period, Moses repeated the Ten Commandments to the Israelites (*Deut. 5: 1-21*) and gave them a final sermon and summary of God's will for them, before they crossed the Jordan and entered the land promised to their ancestor Abraham. In today's excerpt from this great sermon, we are warned that our prosperity in God's goodness must not blind us to our need to consciously rely upon God's help and enjoy God's praise. Worshipping and obeying God is essential to our joy and freedom. Otherwise, we will end up slaves again. This is not because God is vindictive or conditional in his grace. It is because God alone is the source of goodness and joy. Substitutes will leave us unsatisfied, and less than fully human.

In today's full and complicated life, we are easily tempted to think or feel we're too busy to take time "just" to worship God. There are others who "need" church more than us –they can keep it going this week! We wouldn't "get" as much out of the service as we would by staying in bed or doing something else. We can always go next week... next month... next year!

Then we are thinking just like the "consumers" the economic manipulators of our society want us to be. "What's in it for me?" God has created pretty effective "consumers" –like locusts or blood-suckers. Their main purpose in life is in fact to "consume" –and then get eaten, fulfilling other life-form's needs! So who really benefits from all our "consuming"? Only the corporations and investors who make money from this unnecessary spending. But we are not mere "consumers". We are children of the Creator and the stewards of his creation. It is a gift from God, that that we can dig iron and copper and plant crops and be "satisfied" in all our work. But the point of the gift is to enjoy the Giver, and delight in gratitude and grace.

Let's consider "*the regularity of our attendance at worship*". Do we attend a service where we can meaningfully praise God, and grow in knowing him? Does our conversation with others there, our singing and praying, and our attention to the readings and the sermon, focus us on God's presence and plans for our life? How do we prepare for worship each week, to make it meaningful and worthwhile for us, and to God?

Prayer:

Lord,

Whatever we build, give us a glimpse of glory.

Whatever we make, give us a sense of wonder.

Wherever we travel, give us a sense of reverence.

Whoever we meet, give us a sense of awe.

Whatever we do, give us a sense of achievement.

Whatever our situation, give us knowledge of you.

(David Adam, Power Lines, London: SPCK Triangle, 1992)

Thursday in Week One:

Begin with a time of quiet focusing on God in prayer.

Then read: **Hebrews 10: 11-25.**

The author of the Letter to the Hebrews has been writing about the unique, saving ministry of Jesus Christ as our great “High Priest”. The one complete sacrifice of the cross, and the resurrection of Jesus, contrast vividly with the need for earthly priests to repeat their sacrifices again and again. Jesus has done it all, for us! Paradoxically, however, today’s reading then urges us to persevere in the “new and living way” that Christ has “opened” for us, “meeting together” to “encourage one another –and all the more as you see the day approaching.” (*Hebrews 10: 25*)

On the one hand, the Christian life is about Christ’s sufficiency as our Lord and Saviour. On the other hand, it is about how “we may spur one-another on toward love and good deeds” (*Heb. 10: 24*). Here, as in the rest of the New Testament, we have this contra-intuitive relationship between God’s unconditional grace and our non-negotiable mandate to be about good works. The latter does not earn the former, but instead grows out of it. They are “fruits”, not “roots”. Our Christian activity is our response of gratitude and delight to God’s love in Jesus; and not a selfish effort at getting God’s attention or approval.

This reality is so counter to our normal way of thinking (i.e., that we must earn what we get and prove ourselves worthy), that it is near impossible to thoroughly believe and practice, apart from worship. In worship, we focus on a Reality beyond our greatest imaginings, and celebrate the fact that this Reality cares for us and invites us into a relationship, just for the love and delight of it. In worship, we can truly appropriate the Life of Grace.

The beauty of Anglican worship is that it is *not* primarily about listening to sermons! A sermon-oriented style of worship, as I know from the practice of my own first twenty-seven years of faithful church-going, can easily become like a teaching-time, a practice of learning what I should be “doing” for God. Full Christian worship, however, is about “remembering” what Jesus has done –“given” and “poured out” – for us. Week by week, as we go up to receive Holy Communion in a kind of reverse “altar-call,” we give ourselves to God only because and though the One by whom God gives himself to us.

Prayer:

**O Almighty and most merciful God,
of thy bountiful goodness keep us, we beseech thee,
from all things that may hurt us;
that we, being ready both in body and soul,
may cheerfully accomplish those things
that thou wouldst have done;
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

(BCP, Trinity XX)

Friday in Week One:

Begin with a time of quiet focusing on God in prayer. On Friday it is appropriate to think of the suffering Jesus endured in order to save us, and the continued suffering he came to heal and forgive in the world.

Then read: **1 Corinthians 11: 23-32.**

In this critical mandate for Christians to share in the Lord's Supper, St. Paul actually warns us that if we do not receive communion properly, we will become "weak and sick" and perhaps even prematurely die!

Does this mean that God will punish us if we are not pious or worthy enough to share in communion? What a contradiction such an idea would be, of this, the most central sign of God's forgiveness and mercy that Jesus has given to us! In the Eucharist we are to "... proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." Surely if we are proclaiming his death for our salvation and his coming to welcome us to glory, then the sacrament is not a dangerous moral obstacle course, the failing of which would be to our hurt.

I realized the real meaning of this passage at a healing conference with the Rev. Dr. Paul Malicote and others in 1993. St. Paul is saying that without the "benefits of His passion" (*BCP* Prayer of Consecration, page 83), surely communicated to us in Holy Communion, our unsaved state is one of "weakness" and "sickness", leading, perhaps, even to premature death. Indeed even just "going through the motions" of the Eucharist without allowing its Host to heal and redeem our relationships with others, can be to no avail against the deprivations of our sinful humanity. (Communion is not magic. We "feed on him in our hearts by faith, with thanksgiving." It is about trusting and relationships.)

Sometimes Christians talk as if the Cross of Christ was for God's sake –God punishing Jesus in order to do something with his own anger problem or in order to fulfill the dictates of "justice". This nonsense breaks up the unity of the Trinity, and makes God out to be the victim of his own angry egotism or a less-than-almighty obligation to some sort of "justice" above and outside of himself. "God is love" (1 John 4: 16). The Cross is indeed an objective deliverance from real evil. Yet it is for *our* sakes. Holy Communion is one powerful way that we can receive its efficacy.

Prayer:

**Lord Jesus, at this hour you hung on the cross,
Stretching out your arms in love to all.
May all the people of the world
be drawn to your uplifted love,
especially the people we shall work with next.
Lord Jesus, in the midst of mockery and madness
you found peace to remain in your Father's will.
In the midst of the fretful day,
give us peace to remain in our Father's will.**

(Ray Simpson, A Holy Island Prayer Book, Morehouse, 2003)

Week Two: Personal Prayer and Bible-Reading

Monday:

Begin with a time of quiet focusing on God in prayer

(Each day you could begin by praying the *Kyrie*, cf. Table of Contents page).

Then read: **Daniel 6: 1-23.**

When we consider our Prayer Book's advice that "*Every Christian man or woman should from time to time frame*" for ourselves "*a RULE OF LIFE in accordance with the precepts of the Gospel...*" in relation to sharing in public worship and Holy Communion, there is little leeway in "*the faith and order of the church*". We are to attend weekly –and ideally on the Lord's Day (*Acts 20: 7; Revelation 1: 10; 1 Corinthians 16: 2*). Personally, if I have not received communion on Sunday, I look for another opportunity, perhaps at a different church, during the week. That is up to my discretion. But a weekly form of "regularity" in joining other Christians in worship is not. We are to live a weekly pattern of worship and Eucharist.

This week, we will be considering the need for a personal Rule of Life regarding our "*practice of private prayer, Bible-reading, and self-discipline.*" Here, much more flexibility and discretion is needed. What is best for each person? Yet the phrase "*self-discipline*" is used. A proper habit of prayer and Bible-reading must move beyond doing it on a whim or a convenience, to a defined regimen.

In spite of the pressure and business of being the best of 120 administrators in the Persian Empire, Daniel took the time to pray three times a day (*Daniel 6: 10*). It is interesting to see he had a favourite spot, with a favourite view –looking west toward Jerusalem. Intentional habits of prayer require effort. It helps to make everything else about this practice as easy and as comfortable as we can. I have a favourite chair, looking out to a pleasant view of the lilac bushes, maples and sky in my back yard. Even when this practice became dangerous for him, Daniel persisted. We all know the story. Such a habit of prayer gave Daniel the spiritual strength to receive God's help even when he was trapped with hungry lions. God could easily deliver the kind of person whose spirit was so prayerfully in tune with God's Spirit. In the same way, our personal devotional discipline will allow God to guide and help us. Just as Bruce Cockburn sings, we may "wonder where the lions are!"

Today we all accept the wisdom of having disciplined diets, exercise, or the taking of our medications regularly. Each person should follow a regime designed for their unique constitution and lifestyle. Well, the same is true for prayer!

Prayer:

**Gracious God, you have heard the prayers of your faithful people;
you know our needs before we ask, and our ignorance in asking.**

Grant our requests as may be best for us.

This we ask in the name of your Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

(Book of Alternative Services p. 127)

Tuesday in Week Two:

Begin with a time of quiet focusing on God in prayer.

Then read: **Luke 11: 1-13.**

Today's reading highlights the disciples' desire to enjoy a prayer-life similar to that of their Master (*Luke 5: 16; 6: 12; 9: 18 etc.*). Even John the Baptist's followers were instructed in prayer. It is to the church's shame, that we seem to assume that people will just know how to pray, with little guidance or direction. Jesus responds to their request with two essential resources: (1) a form for our prayers, the Lord's Prayer (which we know by heart from Matthew's longer version, *Matthew 6: 9-13*, with an added doxology); and (2) unforgettable parables encouraging us to persist, especially when we're discouraged into thinking that our prayers will not be heard. Jesus also gave other parables, encouraging us to keep praying even when we doubt we are being answered; and to be bluntly honest in our petitions, since God knows us truly anyway, yet loves us in spite of it all (*Luke 18: 1-14*). We pray, not because we feel at the time that it works, but because we believe God is merciful.

Our prayers do need a form. I'm not talking about the dozens of "help me!" or "thank you!" prayers that we will spontaneously offer during the day –the more so as our more formal prayer habits build us into spiritual shape. I am thinking about those intentional times of prayerful "exercise" or "taking our medication". That form is the Lord's Prayer, which is not only a specific set of words, prayed heartfully and with a meaning that we discover will come to fit each circumstance ("When you pray, say: 'Father, hallowed...'" *Luke 6: 2*). It is also meant to be a template for prayer itself ("This, then, is *how* we should pray: 'Our Father...'" *Matthew 6: 9*).

Since we are to pray "give us this day our daily bread," it is clear we are to formally pray at least daily. And though our mood or thoughts will affect the nature of our prayer, each time of formal prayer should include elements of:

- Praise ("Adoration", including thanksgiving) ('hallowed be your name');
- Prayer for God's cause of love and justice (his 'kingdom' and his 'will');
- Requests for our and other's material needs ('our daily bread'); and
- Requests for our spiritual and relational needs (forgiveness, freedom from temptation, and deliverance from evil).

Some of these various dimensions of prayer may take up more or less time or effort than others, depending on our needs that day. Yet may they all be present!

Prayer:

**Let thy merciful ears, O Lord,
be open to the prayers of thy humble servants;
and that they may obtain their petitions
make them to ask such things as shall please thee;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

(BCP Collect for Trinity X)

Wednesday in Week Two:

Begin with a time of quiet focusing on God in prayer.

Then read: **Ephesians 3: 13-21.**

Today's Lesson is one of the many beautiful prayers that Paul recorded for the people he loved (for example, *Philippians 1: 3-4,9-11* or *Colossians 1: 9-12*). Note this prayer's insightful trust that every "family" (literally in Greek, *patria*, "fatherhood") in "heaven and earth" receives its true "name" (character and identity) from God's own parenthood (*patros*, "father") of all. Real prayer is like a young child's instinct to sit on her mother's lap and tell her everything, just for the love of it and the sharing involved. Often the parent knows what the child is talking about and the child's true thoughts and feelings even better than the child herself. Just the same, that communion is precious to the parent, as our prayers are precious to the Father. We may want to get help. God just wants to talk with his children!!

Note how Paul prays. I'm sure there were times when he prayed for the Ephesians' safety and prosperity (their "daily bread"). But here he prays that they may be strengthened by the Holy Spirit, to know the presence of Christ in their lives, and to experience and receive and reflect God's *love*—"love" is repeated three times—so that they will be "filled to the measure of all the fullness of God." Paul prays that they share in all the rich fullness of God, who has come to us in Jesus. That is the goal of Christian spirituality: to become who we are meant to be as God's children.

Continuing from yesterday's meditation, you may recall that many people use the acronym *ACTS* to guide their formal prayers (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving and Supplication). Though it is not as mnemonically easy, I prefer what used to be taught in Sunday School: a "**Handful of Prayer**" (represented by counting through all five fingers as we pray):

- (1) **Adoration** ("God, you're good! I love you!");
- (2) **Confession** ("But I'm not so good. I'm sorry.");
- (3) **Supplication** ("Help me, Lord.");
- (4) **Intercession** ("Help others, Lord."); ending on a positive note with
- (5) **Thanksgiving** ("Thank you, Jesus!").

I have found that this specific order works best for the flow and effectiveness (for me) of my prayers. (It is also present in the Daily Offices in our *Prayer Book* and the *BAS*.) (For my first few years as a Christian learning to pray with discipline I actually used my fingers. Thank God, my parishioners don't have to watch me doing that!) (See "Further Resources", page 33.)

Prayer:

God, you're good!

Sorry I don't always show it;

But help me, more and more, to know it.

Help the folks I fret about –so they won't blow it.

And in my boat of gratitude: May I always row it!

(The Rev'd Chris McMullen)

Thursday in Week Two:

Begin with a time of quiet focusing on God in prayer.

Then read: **Psalm 119: 65-80.**

Today's reading is from the longest psalm in the Bible, Psalm 119, an intent meditation on the blessings of God's Word and Law, with a stanza for each letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Each stanza uses eight different Hebrew words for God's word, law, command or whatever. It gets the point across! "O let thy merciful kindness be my comfort, according to thy word unto thy servant." (*Ps. 119:76, BCP Version.*) As we get to know God's word in the Bible, we'll better get to understand and appreciate God's mercies and help.

Anglican spirituality has always included the regular praying of the psalms. The *Prayer Book's* daily office prays through the Psalter, in order, once a month. That's about five psalms a day –quite an endeavour, inspired by the discipline of Benedictine monasteries. The challenge of offering them in that way faithfully certainly stretches spiritual muscles. I prefer the seven-week rotation in the *BAS's* daily lectionary –about one or two for each office, rearranged in an order to be appropriate for the morning or evening; with the praising "Alléluia!" psalms on Sundays; psalms of lament and suffering assigned for our prayers on Fridays. In both disciplines, as we grow in familiarity with the psalms over the years, the Holy Spirit will give our memories more and more material with which he can lead us, in phrasing and offering our own spontaneous (or "extempore") prayers.

The Psalms, conveniently found right in the middle of the Bible when we open it (if there are not a lot of concordances and aids at the back of it), are the Prayer Book (or Hymn Book) of the Bible. They are our God-inspired examples of how we may talk to God (and listen to God as he occasionally talks back, as often happens in the psalms, for example, Psalm 12). That is why the Psalms include feelings and petitions that are sometimes not very godly for a Christian, and certainly not suitable for public worship. Truth is that we sinners do in fact feel petty or vindictive at times, and God knows it. In honest, real prayer, we will share those darker sides of our hearts with God. God can take it! His shoulders are broad, so to speak, and God heals and forgives. We need to express such negative emotions and get them out of our system. Better we share them with God, than attack a neighbour!

Prayer:

**"Your word is a lantern to my feet
and a light upon my path.
I have sworn and am determined
to keep your righteous judgements.
I am deeply troubled;
preserve my life, O Lord, according to your word.
Accept, O Lord, the willing tribute of my lips
and teach me your judgements."**

(Psalm 119: 105-108, BAS Version)

Friday in Week Two:

Begin with a time of quiet focusing on God in prayer. On Friday it is appropriate to think of the suffering Jesus endured in order to save us, and the continued suffering he came to heal and forgive in the world.

Then read: **2 Timothy 3: 12-17.**

Many say that Jesus was a great moral teacher but not a Saviour. How could a teacher be so good, if his own students immediately hailed him as God on earth once he'd been executed by the best religious and political authorities of the day? Hardly the sign of well-taught Jews! Unless, of course, Jesus had actually come back from the dead, to *be* a Saviour to his followers, by giving them the Spirit they would need, to live up to his demanding teachings! Without him as our Saviour, Jesus' moral teaching sets us up for a hard fall. No one, without supernatural help, could live up to his call, without repeated failure, and much trouble and trial from this cruel world. God is not cruel. Christian life is to be lived by *Spirit-filled* Christians!

The New Testament is very frank about the extra stresses and difficulties a person will take upon themselves by becoming a Christian –from the blunt promise about persecutions at the conclusion of what is often misleadingly hailed as the “heart” of Jesus “moral teaching”, the Beatitudes (*Matthew 5: 10-12*), to St. Paul's warning in today's reading that “everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (*2 Timothy 3: 12*).

We need a spiritual discipline, a Rule of Life. Without it, we will be like untrained, unconditioned football players entering the game, only to quickly get hurt!

Paul then goes on to speak about our main resource for spiritual training and conditioning: the Holy Scriptures. We are told they are “inspired,” literally “God-breathed,” in other words personally designed by God's Spirit, moving people to write and edit and pass on these writings over centuries, so that Christians may have a resource for understanding God's way and his help in our daily lives today.

Written in 66 different books over a thousand years of different times and places, the Bible makes for a lousy “rule-book” or statement of what we should believe. But it does make for a wonderful library of witness, prayer and precedents, given to us by God's Holy Spirit himself, so that we are “thoroughly equipped for every good work” (*2 Timothy 3: 17*). We can read something from this “library” every day, gradually learning the Bible's panoramic story of grace, and becoming accustomed to God's reign.

Prayer:

**Blessed Lord, who hast caused all holy Scriptures
to be written for our learning: Grant that we may in such wise
hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them,
that by patience and comfort of thy holy Word, we may
embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life,
which thou hast given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ.**

(BCP Collect for Advent II)

Week Three:

Daily and Weekly Living as Followers of Jesus

Monday:

Begin with a time of quiet focusing on God in prayer

(Each day you could begin by praying the *Kyrie*, cf. Table of Contents page).

Then read: **Luke 6: 27-36.**

In this Third of our six-week consideration of the *Book of Common Prayer's* invitation to fashion and follow a personal Rule of Life, we are to think about "*Bringing the teaching and example of Christ*" into our everyday lives. Jesus is not only true God. He is also true Man. He is not only a reliable revelation of who God is. He is also the revelation and restoration of what it means to be truly human. Though Christianity, like Judaism and Islam, is a "religion of the book", it is not only a "religion of a book". The book points beyond itself, to a Person.

In Anglican worship we sit attentively to hear readings from the Bible, and we respond "Thanks be to God" when we are told it is "the Word of the Lord." But we stand and sing or otherwise acclaim Jesus, as we listen to the reading from the Gospels. The Scriptures reach their climax, fulfillment, and true meaning in Jesus. "You search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life," Jesus cautioned his contemporaries; "and it is they that testify on my behalf. Yet you refuse to come to me to have life." (*John 5: 39-40*) Christianity is a religion about living "in" Christ.

Too many Christians have filled themselves up with opinions on this and that, gleaned from the Bible; but lack the spirit of kindness and gracious generosity that is mandated by that very Bible in passages like today's. We are to "Be doers of the Word, and not hearers only." (*James 1: 22*) Jesus urges us to be characterized by an unconditional good will, an unfailing charity, and a love that springs not from the lovability of others but from our own personal integrity and joy. Then and only then will we be living like the people we truly are: "sons and daughters of the Most High" (*Luke 6: 35*).

"What would Jesus do?" A good question, though inadequate to Christian living. Jesus is not absent from the situation, leaving us alone in our call to act on his behalf. We may also ask, "What is Jesus doing?" Right here, for us and in us? How is God blessing us? Then we can know how he may use us to bless others (*Luke 6: 28*).

Prayer:

**O God of life, of all life, of each life,
I offer you my prayers in the love of Christ,
in the company of Christ.
As your own household desires in heaven,
so may I desire on earth this day.**

(*J. Philip Newell, Celtic Prayers from Iona, Paulist Press, 1997*)

Tuesday in Week Three:

Begin with a time of quiet focusing on God in prayer.

Then read: **Matthew 25: 14-30.**

Our Creator, this parable tells us, is making a big investment in us and through us, to “each according to his ability” (*Matthew 25: 15*). That can be very intimidating, if we think our “master” is a “hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed” (*25: 24*). Indeed, when we are being timid or cowardly, perhaps that is just what we are saying, by our actions or lack of them, about our God. On the other hand, what if we believe our “master” is the sort of Person who likes to say “Come and share your master’s happiness!” (*24: 21 and 23*)? Life would not only be full of adventure. We would enjoy ourselves!

After all, what is a “talent”? What would the Creator of all things “lose” through us, if we made a mistake with his “investment”? In the end, all we take with us is our characters, our loves and our experiences. The rest will all become dust. Though originally a “talent” referred to a certain weight of gold, this parable has inspired our English usage of the term so that now it means our gifts and abilities. God’s “wealth” is in the success of who we become, rather than what we do. God could, I suppose, after all, in a different kind of world, do it all himself –and do it rather much better than we could ever do! But that’s not what’s important to God.

Experienced business people will say that every successful entrepreneur has known many times of failure. That’s the best, sometimes the only, way we can learn. The key is how to learn from our mistakes. Confession and repentance are not commanded from us because God wants to humiliate us. They are asked of us because that’s the way God’s grace can take the coals of our failings and turn them into the diamonds of his glory. And the making of diamonds requires a lot of pressure! A healthy edifying pressure, that comes from God’s high calling to us, rather than an unbelieving fear of looking bad or having to admit we’re not perfect yet. God is still working on us! We have permission to try, perhaps fail, and learn!

So, what are we doing, with the talents God has given us?

Prayer:

**Almighty God,
whose loving hand hath given
us all we possess:
Grant us grace that we
may honour thee with our substance,
and, remembering the account
which we must one day give,
may be faithful stewards of thy bounty;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

(BCP Family Prayers, page 734)

Wednesday in Week Three:

Begin with a time of quiet focusing on God in prayer.

Then read: **Ephesians 2: 1-10.**

As we think about bringing the teaching and example of Christ into our own daily lives, it is critical that we remember we are not just talking about emulating a dead hero. We are “created in Christ Jesus to do good works” (*Ephesians 2: 10*) –a creative process that included Jesus’ death and resurrection and our incorporation into that death to sin and rising to new life, through our baptism, our faith, and the gift of God’s Spirit. (The Spirit is not explicitly mentioned in today’s excerpt from Ephesians but it is highlighted throughout. See *1: 13,17; 2: 18; 3: 16; 4: 3-4 ; 5: 18.*)

This is above all a free gift (*2: 8*). Yet it is a gift that is best enjoyed by sharing in God’s work (*2: 10*). Jesus wants to reach out, through us!

Notice that Paul is always speaking in the plural. “All of *us*... God raised *us* with Christ... *we* are God’s workmanship.” The Christian life is not a solitary life. (Though some are called to solitary vocations, they follow that route in order to pray for the rest of us; or to learn from the saints who have gone before us; and often they still report to a spiritual director in some way or another.) It is a life lived in community.

We are almost half-way through our program of learning about a Rule of Life. If you haven’t yet started, now would be a good time to begin thinking about what the six-fold form of your own personal Rule may look like. Though it is not mentioned in the Prayer Book’s guidelines, it would be a good thing if there was someone who would do you the favour of holding you accountable to the rule you design for yourself. Some Anglicans have a personal Spiritual Director. For a few years, the Ven. Lyman Harding was my director, and this was of great benefit to me. The Celtic Christians of Britain each adopted an *amchara* or “soul-friend,” with whom they would regularly share their spiritual goals and discoveries.

If you are following this devotional as part of a parish endeavour, your minister may have designed some sort of liturgy for Easter, Christ the King Sunday or whenever your parish’s program concludes, where you will offer your personal Rule of Life to God, in the context of your parish’s corporate renewal in Christian discipleship. This is so we have the mutual encouragement of designing, offering and being accountable to a rule, with the help and company of other like-minded pilgrims. The important thing is that your Rule be very personal, but not isolated!

Prayer:

**“Peace between neighbours, Peace between kindred,
Peace between lovers, In the love of the King of life...
Bless, O Christ my face; And let my face bless every thing;
Bless, O Christ, mine eye; And let mine eye bless all it sees.”**

(Carmina Gadelica III.267)

Thursday in Week Three:

Begin with a time of quiet focusing on God in prayer.

Then read: **Luke 10: 25-37.**

I remember speeding along a road in Albert County, late for a church meeting. I passed a stalled truck with its hood up. Beside the truck was a disagreeable fellow that I preferred to avoid. As you can imagine, I didn't get too far down the highway before the Spirit of the Lord inwardly inquired of me whether I was a priest, a Levite... or a neighbour and a Christian! The meeting started too late... but I was given a great illustration for many sermons on the Parable of the Good Samaritan!

This parable is a perfect example of how the Holy Spirit can use the messages of the Bible to teach us, warn us, or build us up. He has moved across centuries, inspiring ever new generations to kindness and friendship. The key is "compassion" –from the Latin *passio* and *com*, literally, "I suffer with". Compassion is a good and human thing. Those without it are identified as "sociopaths". More than that, we believe in a compassionate God –a Creator who would not leave his creation alone in suffering, but became a creature himself, to suffer with us and for us.

So no wonder, Jesus calls us to go and do likewise. It's what life is all about!

At the "north" end of the narthex at the Church of the Good Shepherd in Saint John is a stained-glass window of the Parable of the Good Samaritan. It is labelled, "*Go and Do Thou Likewise.*" It compliments and matches the window at the other, "south" end of the narthex, which shows Jesus in the boat with Peter and the other fishermen, labelled, "*Follow Me!*" The two windows obviously belong together, exhorting worshippers as they leave the church building and return to daily living. But few people notice the identity of both the Good Samaritan and the victim he assists. There is no doubt –the faces of both match the dominant face in the other window. They are both Jesus! Jesus is our true Neighbour, who binds us up and leads us to health. He is also waiting for us in our neighbours. Loving them is how we "follow him".

Prayer:

**Lord, make us instruments of your peace.
Where there is hatred, let us sow love;
where there is injury, pardon; where there is discord, union;
where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy.
Grant that we may not so much seek
to be consoled as to console;
to be understood, as to understand; to be loved, as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive,
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.**

(Prayer of St. Francis, BAS # 31 page 682)

Friday in Week Three:

Begin with a time of quiet focusing on God in prayer. On Friday it is appropriate to think of the suffering Jesus endured in order to save us, and the continued suffering he came to heal and forgive in the world.

Then read: **1 John 4: 7-21.**

It is indeed a good thing to use our devotions every Friday to remember and thank God for the sacrifice of the Cross. That is history's supreme example of love. And love is the deepest meaning and highest destiny of everything! For "God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them." (1 John 4: 16)

Nor is this love just a vague feeling of warm cuddliness. Love is concrete, specific, and if necessary, even ugly and bloody. "This is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us, and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins." (1 John 4: 10)

As we think about a Rule of Life, we need to be concrete, and realistic. It is not very helpful to say, "I will try to be more loving..." Of course you will! You are not a bad person! But how? God showed his love in sending "his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him." (1 John 4: 9) What concrete, practical steps of helping others can we offer to God, in our Rule, as our personal way to grow spiritually? Who are the people in our daily routines, who need our help and care?

If we are really up for a challenge, who is it in our circles of care, whom we, if we would only admit it, underneath all the excusing and self-preserving of judgementalism or dismissal, actually *fear*? After all, "perfect love drives out fear." (1 John 4: 18). That verse is talking about our relationship with God, but its wisdom can be applied to others, and the whole point of loving others according to St. John here is that God may "live in us, and his love is made complete in us." (1 John 4: 12)

Jesus of course had good reason to be afraid. Yet he "for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame..." (Hebrews 12: 2) The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews understands that "joy" of Christ very specifically, as his delight in becoming the "first" of many redeemed sisters and brothers (Hebrews 2: 10-15). It was the joy of love. Not a warm fuzzy feeling (Jesus could hardly have enjoyed that on the cross), but a mature choice. Very often, and sometimes only after a period of time, those loving choices are rewarded by loving feelings and delight. But the feelings are the icing on the cake. The "cake" is an act of the mind and of the will.

Prayer:

**Almighty and everlasting God, who, of thy tender love
towards mankind, hast sent thy Son our Saviour Jesus Christ,
to take upon him our flesh, and to suffer death upon the cross,
that all mankind should follow the example of his great humility:
mercifully grant, that we may both follow his example of patience,
and also be made partakers of his resurrection;
through the same Jesus Christ our Lord.**

(BCP Collect for Maundy Thursday)

Week Four: Witnessing to our Faith in Christ

Monday:

Begin with a time of quiet focusing on God in prayer

(Each day you could begin by praying the *Kyrie*, cf. Table of Contents page).

Then read: **Matthew 5: 13-16.**

Our Creator's remarkable plan for redeeming his creation and setting it back on course begins with creation's root problem: the sin of human beings. We are meant to be the world's regents and stewards. God saves and heals us; and since we are meant to be God's servants and representatives on earth in the first place, that very salvation includes our being re-established and called as servants of God in our daily living and being.

Jesus characterizes this calling beautifully when he summons us to be salt in the "meat" of the wider society (that will rot without his help in and through us); and "light" to the dark world (like the glow of a city ahead, welcoming and encouraging pilgrims journeying across a dark and empty desert).

Notice these two images do not imply that we can "fix" everything. That is God's job, which will be perfected on the Day of the final Resurrection. But Jesus does intend that the light of his salvation is to shine, not merely *to us*, but thoroughly *through us*. We're to shed some light in a dark world, so people can see the city of God among us! And no one lights a lamp to put it under a basket!

People are to see our "good deeds" (notice the emphasis on *action*), and "praise your Father in heaven." In other words, return to a life of worship and delight in God's grace themselves. There is to be a selfless, shared or catalyzing quality to our efforts that will naturally lead people beyond just being impressed with *us* ("what a great church") to, in fact, praising God.

So our natural *ambition* to accomplish things is not itself wrong. That is only wrong when we are looking for praise from others instead of commendation from God (*Matthew 6: 2-4, 5-6, etc.*). A smug self-satisfaction, when others compliment us, is but a pale falling short of the delight of knowing that God is glorified and his people a step closer to redemption. In fact, we are truly destined for just such a vocation (*Ephesians 2: 9-10*, as we read last week, which is expanding on *Ephesians 1: 1-10*).

Prayer:

**Lord, reveal in us your glory,
Stir in us your power,
Open in us your love,
Work in us your miracles,
Show in us your way,
Renew in us your Kingdom,
Abide in us Yourself.**

(David Adam, Power Lines, SPCK, 1992)

Tuesday in Week Four:

Begin with a time of quiet focusing on God in prayer.

Then read: **Philippians 2: 4-16.**

Again and again, the New Testament coaches us in humility and selflessness, not because God is only glorified when people are put down (a view sadly implicit in many spiritualities), but because the universe, like God himself, is energized for love and service to others: “The last shall be first and the first shall be last... even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (*Mark 10: 31, 45*)

In the very first story of the Bible, people are created to be the gardeners of earth’s flora and the shepherds of earth’s life (*Genesis 1: 26; 2: 15*). We are to find joy in our work – “it is the gift of God” (*Ecclesiastes 3: 13*). Paul himself, in today’s reading, anticipates his “boasting”, or enjoying the fruit of his labours, in the faithful discipleship of the Philippians (2: 16). The deepest joy is found when our activities are selflessly in keeping with God’s will: God working in and through us “to will and... act according to his good pleasure.” (*Phil. 2: 13*) Paul boldly calls this “working out our own salvation” (2: 12).

This week we consider the fourth dimension of a Rule of Life, “*the boldness of (our) spoken witness to (our) faith in Christ.*” People may say, “I witness to my faith by my actions.” Wrong answer! Even if our actions are heroic, what they would say to others is that we are fine Christians! It would be a witness to ourselves, not to Jesus. Unless we talk about the One for whom we are doing our “good works” and whose help has inspired us, we are *not* “shining like stars in the universe as we hold out the word of life” (2: 15-16 –notice the echo of Jesus’ command to be “the light of the world”). We would be encouraging a “boasting” only about ourselves.

I know that verbally witnessing to Jesus is quite a stretch for most Anglican folks, so let’s start easy! “Do everything without complaining or grumbling...” (*Phil. 2: 14*) We live in a time when people are quick to curse, complain or criticize. What if our habit instead was to bless, express thanks, and look at the positive? “Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear.” (*Ephesians 4: 29*) You know the sort of saint who never says anything if they can’t say something uplifting. Can we be like that?

Prayer:

**Almighty God, your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ
is the light of the world.
May your people, illumined by your word and sacraments,
shine with the radiance of his glory,
that he may be known, worshipped and obeyed
to the ends of the earth;
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.**

(Collect for Epiphany II, BAS page 349)

Wednesday in Week Four:

Begin with a time of quiet focusing on God in prayer.

Then read: **Matthew 10: 16-20, 26-33.**

Though Matthew in today's reading is on the surface reporting Jesus' advice to the Twelve before he sent them out as apprentice evangelists, our Lord's words really address the experiences of the Twelve in the years following his resurrection (10: 17-18). It is clear that Matthew is expecting his readers to apply Jesus' instructions to their own post-Easter lives and witness.

It is also clear that Jesus doesn't sugar-coat the challenges of witnessing to him. "All men will hate you because of me..." (10: 22 –a warning, thank God, more applicable to Christians in other times and places than in our Gospel-leavened society.) But we are not to be afraid. Spiritual truths that may seem hidden now, will one day be revealed. Our witness will be vindicated (10: 26-27). I think that addresses our biggest fear: That we will sound foolish! But we will only seem foolish to those whose opinions, in the end, should not govern our convictions and behaviour. "The message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." (1 Corinthians 1: 18)

Let us respect the urgency in Jesus' words (10: 32-33): "Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven; but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny..." It is imperative for God's rescue operation in Christ that his rescued people themselves become part of the rescue team! Though we are not all called to be preachers or evangelists, each of us is called to verbally acknowledge our Saviour before others. Each of us is to offer a real-life, daily witness that those who are so gifted as preachers and evangelists, can then point to, build upon, and even preach about!

An essential promise in this passage however is that we are never left alone in this challenging call to speak about our faith in Jesus. We return to our *spirituality*: "...do not worry about how you are to speak... for what you are to say will be given to you at that time; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you." (10: 19-20) Come, Holy Spirit!

Finally, let's remember that this dimension of our Rule of Life is for our *spiritual development*. We don't have to be good at it! We might even fail –and learn from our mistakes. Like in any other discipline, it's the practice that is important.

Prayer:

**My speech: may it praise you without flaw,
King of heaven and earth!
Make it easy for me, pure Lord,
to do you all service, and to adore you.
Father of all true affections:
Hear, all my prayers; and heal, all my speaking.**
(Adapted from an Irish poem by the Rev'd Chris McMullen)

Thursday in Week Four:

Begin with a time of quiet focusing on God in prayer.

Then read: **1 Peter 2: 9-12.**

In this short reading, Holy Scripture calls us, among other precious things, a “royal priesthood” (1 Peter 2: 9). No, we are not all called to be evangelists or preachers. But we are all elected as priests (See also *Revelation 1: 6; 5: 10 and 20: 6*)! And what is our vocation, as priests by virtue of our baptism into Christ? I suppose many of us might think of the ministry of prayer, which is true enough. But what Peter highlights in this text is our witness: “...that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light!” (1 Peter 2: 9)

Part of our Rule of Life, then, according to the *Book of Common Prayer*, is exercising discipline and intentionality about speaking to others about Christ.

As with the other dimensions of our personal “Rule”, it is important that we be realistic and specific. Not vague intentions like “I will try to talk about my faith more often” or unreachable goals like “I will explain the plan of the Gospel to three people every week.” (There are people who can do that, but it is because they have been practising for a long time, or they have the spiritual gift of evangelism –more about spiritual gifts next week.) Instead ask yourself: what is a realistic goal, for this time and place in my life, which will stretch me spiritually into being more fit to “shine in my small corner” (as the old hymn goes) as a “light to the world”? Perhaps we make a short list of family members, friends or workmates, for whom we will pray, and about whom we will ask God to open up opportunities or give us creative ways in which we can speak about how good it is for us to place our trust in Jesus. Even a prayer card or special greeting card can be an inspiring start!

In one personally revealing note St. Paul, one of the greatest evangelists the church has ever seen, compares himself to a priest. He considers himself a “minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.” (*Romans 15: 15*) His goal for ministry is helping even non-Jews worship God in a way that has been blessed by the Holy Spirit. Such a job takes words, as well as actions. And not Paul’s words alone, but the help of the witness and worship of ordinary Christians, proving Paul’s preaching with their own testimonies and shared experiences and convictions.

Prayer:

**O God, forasmuch as without thee
we are not able to please thee:
Mercifully grant, that thy Holy Spirit
May in all things direct and rule our hearts:
Through Jesus Christ our Lord.**

(Collect for Trinity XIX, BCP)

Friday in Week Four:

Begin with a time of quiet focusing on God in prayer.

On Friday it is appropriate to think of the suffering Jesus endured in order to save us, as well as the suffering he came to heal and forgive in the world.

Then read: **1 Peter 3: 8-16.**

In today's reading St. Peter is encouraging his people to be faithful as they seek to live the Christian life in the face of opposition and even persecution. Here he speaks about how important it is that we "be there" for each other as Christians. He then quotes from *Psalms 34: 12-16*, itself a wonderful prayer and testimony about trusting in God in the face of opposition and trial.

It is Peter's advice in verses 15-16 that can help us with "the boldness of (our) spoken witness to (our) faith in Christ." We may not be the sort of person who can initiate a spiritual conversation or commence a theological discussion. But if we really want to honour Christ as Lord in our hearts, we will be able to answer others' curiosity about the hope or the joy we naturally express as a symptom of our faith. And we are to do so "with gentleness and respect." We do *not* fail Jesus if we seem to lose the argument! We fail him if we lose the person. (And he can fix that, too.)

It is a good thing to know something about the integrity of Christian faith. There are many helpful books which can bolster our confidence in what we profess. Lee Stroebel was a science-oriented atheist before he came to Christ. His *Case for a Creator* and *The Case for Christ* are even available in video form. Josh McDowell has several books, the best-selling one being *Evidence that Demands a Verdict*. *Mere Christianity* by C.S. Lewis, also a converted atheist, is a very readable presentation of the faith, highlighting how much it makes sense both logically, and in everyday life. Tom Wright's *Simply Christian* does the same thing for contemporary people, especially in his earliest chapters. *Simply Christian* is also available in video form. "Faith" is not the opposite of knowledge, but a trusting, based on facts!

If we remember Jesus' promise of the Holy Spirit (read this Wednesday, *Matthew 10: 19-20*), and also the reality that most people don't need a great intellectual argument so much as the sincere sharing of a friend's convictions or experiences, we can assume we are competent to speak of those things that are most dear to us, and most needed by others. Try it! Don't let the doubter, the sceptical, or the ignorant (!) have the last word!

Prayer:

**Great Creator of the blood-red moon and falling stars,
Great Saviour of the miraculous birth and rising from death,
Great Spirit of the seers and sacred words,
Come into our minds, Come into our mouths,
Come into our deeds,
Until we become your presence and sign.**

Ray Simpson, A Holy Island Prayer Book, Morehouse, 2003)

Week Five: Our Personal Intentional Ministries in our Church and our Community

Monday:

Begin with a time of quiet focusing on God in prayer

(Each day you could begin by praying the *Kyrie*, cf. Table of Contents page).

Then read: **Romans 12: 1-21.**

Today's reading begins with a "Therefore..." For eleven theologically packed chapters, Paul has been articulating his take on the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He moves from proclaiming God's grace, to outlining our corresponding lifestyle of gratitude. We can see that the original Catechism in the *BCP* follows other creeds and catechisms of the Reformation in the same order: From what we may believe (Baptism and the Apostles' Creed, *BCP* pp. 544-6), to how we may live for God (The Ten Commandments, Lord's Prayer, and Sacraments, *BCP* pp. 546-552.) Our *Prayer Book's* Supplementary Instruction also moves from God's works to ours in God, as found in a Rule of Life (pp. 552-555).

Many Anglicans need encouragement –perhaps in the form of a workable Rule of Life! –to pray and read the Bible more regularly, bring the teaching and example of Jesus into their daily business, and speak out about their faith. But most of you who are reading these meditations are already very busy in your church and community. And you have a sense of God's calling and God's will in your hectic schedules. So for this week it would be wrong to try to encourage you to do even more. Perhaps you should even do less! (Don't tell your rector I said that!) Instead, let us think about whether the jobs we're doing in our church and community are the best way for us to use the gifts that God has personally given to each of us; and the most effective way we can personally stretch our spiritual muscles, and grow in Christ's love and strength.

So after an initial appeal for us to join the long heritage of Abraham, making our own grateful sacrifices to God (*Romans 12: 1-2*), Paul invites us to take a realistic assessment of ourselves (*12: 3*), and find our place, with our own unique gifts, within the wider life of the "body" of Christ (*12: 4-8*). We will each have our own way of living the priestly lifestyle of love for which Christ has redeemed us (*12: 9-20*). But it all adds up to the same thing: becoming less a part of humanity's problem, and more a part of God's solution (*12: 21*).

Prayer:

**Almighty God, by grace alone you call us,
and accept us in your service.
Strengthen us by your Spirit,
and make us worthy of your call;
through Jesus Christ our Lord...**

(Collect for Epiphany III, BAS)

Tuesday in Week Five:

Begin with a time of quiet focusing on God in prayer.

Then read: **1 Peter 4: 1-11.**

It is significant that St. Peter, like St. Paul—even with a “therefore”—not only encourage his readers to stop being part of the humanity’s problems (*1 Peter 4: 1-6*) and become part of God’s solution (*4: 7-9*). Peter as well writes about our “administration” (*4: 10*) of God’s gifts in the personalized, unique way that the Holy Spirit has given them to each of us (*4: 10-11*). This is why the *Book of Common Prayer* can only exhort us to a disciplined Christian life, not with a general one-size-fits-all “Anglican” Rule, but with an invitation to “*from time to time frame*” for ourselves a “*RULE OF LIFE*.”

The Northumbria Community, a Celtic Christian group based in Northern England, beautifully summarizes Peter’s appeal for discipline, love and hospitality (*4: 7-9*) in its formal Rule: “This is the Rule we embrace. This is the Rule we will keep: we say Yes to Availability; ...Yes to Vulnerability.” (www.northumbriacommunity.org/who-we-are/the-rule-deeper) What a graceful contrast to today’s usual way of self-preoccupied self-sufficiency!

1 Peter 4: 10 may be translated to say we should “administrate” or exercise “stewardship” with our gifts. This is another Biblical allusion to our vocation as God’s lieutenants in creation (*Genesis 1: 26, 2: 15*). No matter how humble, quiet or unqualified we may think ourselves to be, we wear a high rank in God’s royal priesthood (*1 Peter 2: 9*)! And we should never insult our Creator and Redeemer with nonsense about how we have nothing to offer. Every Christian has God-given gifts to employ for God and others.

Peter neatly summarizes the whole panoply of spiritual gifts into two categories: gifts of “speaking” and gifts of “service” (*4: 11*). I am not sure this is meant to be a contrast, so much as an inclusive phrase. If it is the latter, then perhaps each of us has gifts that fall under both categories. Even if we are the natural leader, that ability is a gift of service. Even if we are not one who can speak in public or with eloquence, that does not mean we do not have our own special gift, perhaps as effective as it is quiet, of telling others about Jesus! What are *your* gifts?

Prayer:

**O Lord Jesu Christ, who at thy first coming didst send
thy minister [John the Baptist] to prepare thy way before thee:
Grant that the ministers and stewards of thy mysteries
may likewise so prepare and make ready thy way,
by turning the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just,
that at thy second coming to judge the world
we may be found an acceptable people in thy sight:
who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Spirit,
ever one God, world without end.**

(BCP Collect for Advent III)

Wednesday in Week Five:

Begin with a time of quiet focusing on God in prayer.

Then read: **1 Corinthians 12: 1-13.**

For the next three meditations we will consider St. Paul's definitive teaching about spiritual gifts in I Corinthians. "I do not want you to be ignorant!" (*1 Cor. 12: 1*) The foundation of his discussion is Paul's magnificent image of the Church as "the Body of Christ" (see also *Romans 12: 4-5; Ephesians 4: 4, 16; Colossians 2: 19; 3: 15*) – Jesus' continued presence in human history until he returns in glory. Years ago Prof. Richard Longenecker of Wycliffe College helped me to see how this image may have grown out of Paul's own personal discovery that in persecuting Christians, he had persecuted the Lord himself: "Saul, Saul, who do you persecute me?" (*Acts 9: 4*) As Jesus himself said, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me." (*Matthew 25: 40*) Our love for the Lord and our love for others are inseparable.

This contrasts to the many divisions among people, even among Christians, in our fallen world – too often themselves caused by mutual suspicions about different gifts. In glory, all humanity will be one under the Father, with and in Jesus. For now, the Church anticipates this unity in its life in the world. Jesus prayed in his great high-priestly prayer that we "...may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you... so that the world may believe that you have sent me." (*John 17: 21*) God's reconciling purpose in Christ gives the blueprint for his distribution of gifts, and our employment of these gifts.

There are several lists of gifts in the New Testament, and many mentioned elsewhere in Scripture (e.g., artistic skill, *Exodus 35: 30-34*). What is *your* unique blend of spiritual gifts? There are several quizzes available to help you get a sense of what your personal gifts – present or potential – may be. If you have not recently done one, why not try it right away? Two excellent ones are in Christian Swarz's *The 3 Colors of Ministry* (NCD), and Peter Wagner's *Discover Your Spiritual Gifts* (the book, or a booklet with just the test itself). Wagner's test is mischievously published online at:

http://exchristian.net/images//wagner_modified_houts.pdf.)

Other online tests: <http://buildingchurch.net/g2s.htm>,

or: <http://www.christianet.com/bible/spiritualgiftstest.htm>.

Prayer:

**Almighty and everlasting God, by whose Spirit
the whole body of the Church is governed and sanctified:
Receive our supplications and prayers, which we offer before thee
for all estates of men [and women] in thy holy Church,
that every member of the same, in [our] vocation and ministry,
may truly and godly serve thee;
through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.**

(BCP Second Collect for Good Friday)

Thursday in Week Five:

Begin with a time of quiet focusing on God in prayer.

Then read: **1 Corinthians 12: 14-31a.**

In today's reading St. Paul continues his appeal for unity in the Corinthian church (*1 Cor. 1: 10-13; 11: 18-20*) with a discussion of spiritual gifts. We need one-another. And other Christians need us actively exercising our gifts!

Our personal Rule of Life should include a fifth dimension: *our "personal service to the Church and the community."* In our parish this may include offices to which we're elected or appointed (hopefully for better reasons than popularity, how much we give or who we're related to), as well as informal ministries that the Spirit has given but no one formally identifies: the one who frequently welcomes and includes visitors at worship, or makes a point to take a card or casserole to folks in distress. Perhaps you have the gift of song? This may mean you should join the choir; but it may also mean you are to lead and encourage your sisters and brothers in the pews. Every faithful pastor or leader should back off from pressuring you if you promise, "I'll pray about it!" (Though they may also be led to keep challenging you about an opportunity or a gift the Spirit has led them to associate with you.)

Only you can know what you are to do with such gifts—though the invitation or guidance of others may help you with your choices. The point is that you make your decisions for the sake of Christ and his body, the church—and of course with a good sense of stewardship about your time and energy— but not just for your own convenience and fancy.

The same is true for our ministry in the wider community, i.e., the particular volunteer services or hobbies that we adopt. Let no one (other than the Lord) dictate what you should do with your "own" time! It turns out that with a lot of practice, I've become better at basketball than my Jr. High failures at the same would have led me to believe. But I also know I'm not that good! Yet my playing gives the other old fellows on my team many opportunities to teach and tease a priest! I try to take it in cheerful humility. For Jesus has shown me that this too serves a healing purpose in his reign!

Prayer:

**Father, in the awareness of your presence,
beneath the shadow of your wings,
in the closeness of your love, may we abide.
Jesus, in the fellowship of your saints,
in the communion of the faithful,
in the church called to mission, may we abide.
Spirit, in the power of your love,
in the fullness of your gifts,
in the guidance of your wisdom, may we abide.**

(David Adam, The Open Gate, SPCK 1994)

Friday in Week Five:

Begin with a time of quiet focusing on God in prayer.

On Friday may think of the suffering Jesus endured in order to save us, and the continued suffering he came to heal and forgive in the world.

Then read: **1 Corinthians 12: 31b – 13:1.**

St. Paul's discussion of spiritual gifts concludes in chapter 14, when he addresses the one gift that most seriously divided and distracted the Corinthians: speaking in tongues. His advice there is consistent with everything he lays out in chapters 12 and 13. But we end this week's reflections on our "*personal service to the Church and the community*" with Paul's magisterial ode to love. How consistently have we remembered that we are to serve others in our church and community, only in the spirit of love?

We probably most frequently hear this chapter at weddings. In truth, it is talking about something much more practical and voluntary than romance. (In other words, the sort of thing that marriage will indeed need if it is to grow beyond romance.) Parishes that follow the *Prayer Book* lectionary for their Sunday lessons will hear it on the Last Sunday before Lent. (In the Revised Common Lectionary, you will hear it on the Fourth Sunday after Epiphany in Year "C".) The Holy Spirit has inspired Paul to give us a precious means-test for our faith and discipleship.

A common spiritual exercise is to carefully read *1 Corinthians 13, verses 4-7*, replacing the word "love" whenever it appears with our Christian name. Are we closer to becoming that sort of person, than say, we were a year ago? Prayers of Confession and Supplication may follow immediately afterwards! It would also be a good time to re-examine and fine-tune our Rule of Life. What could we do to allow the Spirit to grow us in our love?

(Very helpful exercises, designed for each kind of personality, are found in Christian Schwarz's *The 3 Colors of Love*, NCD Resources. It also includes a personality quiz based upon the Fruit of the Spirit, *Galatians 5: 22-23*: "the fruit of the Spirit is love: joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control." That is another helpful reading which with we may assess our personal growth in the Holy Spirit. We each have unique gifts. We must exercise our gifts, however, with a character that reflects the character of Christ.)

Prayer:

**To God the Father, who first loved us,
and made us accepted in the Beloved;
To God the Son, who loved us,
And washed us from our sins in his own blood;
To God the Holy Ghost, who sheds the love of God
abroad in our hearts,
be all love and all glory, for time and for eternity.**

(Bishop Thomas Ken, 1637-1711)

Week Six: Our Financial Stewardship and Conclusion: Preparing our Personal Rule of Life

Monday:

Begin with a time of quiet focusing on God in prayer

(Each day you could begin by praying the *Kyrie*, cf. Table of Contents page).

Then read: **Genesis 28: 10-22.**

Welcome to our final week of prayer and reflection on a Rule of Life. The sixth topic the *Prayer Book* commends to our consideration is “*The offering of money according to [our] means for the support of the work of the Church at home and overseas.*” We euphemistically call this “stewardship” –and then immediately add that stewardship is not just about money! Well, this part of our personal “rule” is about money.

Very early in the Biblical story, we are introduced to the tithe –the discipline of offering one-tenth of all that God gives us, back to God. Jacob is not the first to give a tithe. Abraham significantly gave a tenth of his military booty to that mystical precursor of Christ, Melchizedek (*Genesis 14: 20; Hebrews 7: 4-10*). But Jacob is the first to adopt the tithe as part of a believing lifestyle.

Why would he do so? Jacob was the great manipulator, who got the best of his brother Esau (*Genesis 25: 27-34; 27: 1-38*), and then his uncle Laban (*34: 1-43*). Later he even bests the angel of God in a wrestling match (*32: 22-32*). Is his spontaneous offer of a tithe his way of conniving God’s favour as well? He does seem to be making a conditional promise: “If God will be with me...” (*28: 20*). That said, his promise is a genuine prayer and response to a numinous epiphany, the famous dream of Jacob’s Ladder. The dream is in fact a revelatory promise from God: “...I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you” (*28: 15*). God made his unconditional promise first! So even if Jacob’s tithe is self-serving, it trusts in God’s initiative. He may not be a saint yet. But God is working on him!

It is fair to note that the tithe is not specifically mandated for Christians in the New Testament (though Jesus assumes its validity even as he criticizes those who miss its true meaning, *Matthew 23: 23*). Many Christians give beyond ten percent of their income to the Lord’s work. But most of us give considerably less. We would be unfaithful to Scripture if we did not take this example as the starting point of our reflection and consideration.

Prayer:

We pray for all who confess the name of Christ...

**May we find new and just ways of sharing the goods of the earth,
struggling against exploitation, greed, or lack of concern:**

**May we all live by the abundance of your mercies
and find joy together. Lord, hear our prayer.**

(From Litany # 4, BAS pp. 113-114)

Tuesday in Week Six:

Begin with a time of quiet focusing on God in prayer.

Then read: **Malachi 3: 8-12.**

Jacob's tithe is found very near the beginning of the Old Testament story. Malachi's warning against robbing God is found at the end: "Will anyone rob God? Yet you are robbing me! But you say, 'How are we robbing you?' In your tithes and offerings!" (*Malachi 3: 8*) From Israel's "Rule of Faith," the Ten Commandments, we must conclude that we are breaking at least two commandments when we do not tithe. (2. Worship no idols; 8. No stealing)

We will think more about the relationship between true worship and our offerings later. For now, please note God's remarkable invitation in Malachi 3, to put *God* to the test! "Put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts; see if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you an overflowing blessing" (*3: 10*). We are back to the basic truth about a Rule of Life. Such discipline is not about measuring up to God's preconditions or earning God's favour. It is about being open in our faith and love in such a way, that we are able to fully receive and enjoy all the blessings that God intends for us. "Return to me, and I will return to you, says the Lord Almighty." (*Malachi 3: 7*)

I know that when it comes to the church asking for money, we all tend to get defensive and grumpy. (I recently obeyed our bishop's directive to preach on Stewardship the first Sunday after Thanksgiving, and it was the hardest and most prayed-over sermon I have given in a year.) Why is that? Yes, it's true that every time we turn around, our money is being demanded from us. And yes, it's true that there is a lot more to pray about and act about in our faith than our money. Perhaps however we have gotten away with too much for too long. The days are over when hundreds of nominal worshippers can put a couple dollars on the plate, and the bills will be paid. Now we who choose to worship Christ have to start giving like Christians. In a time when everyone and everything around us worships money, where else should we set start in our habits of thankfulness and faith?

Prayer:

**You are the Lord, the Giver of Life.
You are the Lord, protector from strife.
You are the Lord, with me today.
You are the Lord, guiding my way.
You are the Lord, Almighty and King.
You are the Lord,
accept what I bring.**

*(David Adam, Power Lines: Celtic Prayers about Work.
London: SPCK Triangle, 1992, page 28.
The Rev'd David Adam is the former Vicar of Holy Island,
the Parish of Lindisfarne, England.)*

Wednesday in Week Six:

Begin with a time of quiet focusing on God in prayer.

Then read: **Matthew 6: 19-33.**

It is sobering to consider all the times that Jesus talked about money.

Some examples: the Parables of the Talents (*Matthew 25: 14-30*); the Labourers in the Vineyard (*Matthew 20: 1-16*); the Shrewd Manager (*Luke 16: 1-15*); the Rich Man and Lazarus (*Luke 16: 19-31*); or the Foolish Rich Man who built bigger barns, only to die (*Luke 12: 13-21*). Then there are Jesus' remarks about the Widow's Offering (*Mark 12: 41-44*); Paying our dues to Caesar and God (*Mark 12: 13-17*); Zacchaeus' generosity (*Luke 19: 1-9*); and his end-times warning of woe to the rich, who have already received comfort (*Luke 6: 24*).

Unlike far too many notorious televangelists, all this talk about money was not so that Jesus could make a fortune at his preaching! It was because Jesus was about healing our infirmities and delivering us from our sins. In today's reading, an excerpt from our Lord's definitive Sermon on the Mount, he contrasts "treasures in heaven" with "treasures on earth", and serving God or money. Some of us may be very independent souls. Society's preoccupation with money has not influenced us! Well, then, even if we are not so influenced, perhaps love requires us to set a bold example for those who are so indoctrinated by the ad campaigns and materialism!

The issue, according to Jesus, is what occupies our concerns and plans –what worries us (*Matthew 6: 25-33*). The Creator makes sure the birds can fly and sing with joy; the flowers bloom and dance with beauty. (Actually we are the Creator's stewards in this regard. Due to humanity's negligence and exploitation, there are birds that suffer and flowers that never get to dance in the wind. But that's not God's will and it's not God's fault.) Admittedly we are a bit more complicated in our needs than flowers and birds. But are we not also more beloved (*Matthew 6: 26b*)? We, as opposed to folks who do not know God, "are to seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well" (*6: 33*).

The issue is one of trust in God. Our attitude to money is a telling statement of faith. Our spirituality is deepened, or handicapped, by our use of money. Jesus was not preoccupied about money. He talked about it a lot because he was concerned about what people worshipped, to their own harm, other than their loving God.

In addressing this dimension of the Rule of Life, it is again wise to be simple and realistic. The Diocese of Fredericton Stewardship Committee invites us to gradually raise our givings by 1% of our income a year, until we reach a tithe. Where are *you*?

Prayer:

**No matter what I say this week, Lord,
and no matter what I do:
Here! ...My weekly offering
tells you what I think of you.**

(The Rev'd Chris McMullen, inspired by an offering skit by the Covenant Players)

Thursday in Week Six:

Begin with a time of quiet focusing on God in prayer.

Then read: **Mark 10: 17-28.**

This is our penultimate text, as we consider our Rule of Life. Since this week we are considering “*the offering of money according to [our] means for the support of the work of the Church...*” it does provide a suitable warning for the (mostly) wealthiest Christians the world has ever seen: “How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!” (*Mark 10: 23*)

I believe we have been thoroughly brainwashed by the powers-that-be in our consumerist economy to think we are not rich. We have so many debts! Our house is not as big as our neighbour’s! Our car is older than the cars on TV! We can’t afford to vacation in Hawaii! We don’t eat out twice a week! But consider the standard of living of most Christians in today’s world, or the lifestyle of our parents, grandparents, or our forbears who came to Canada. Most of us enjoy a lifestyle that even the Rich Young Ruler could not imagine.

In spite of all his wealth, and his self-assessment as a pretty good Jew (*10: 20*, a view Jesus doesn’t contradict), the man feels something is missing. He wants “eternal life”. We may think of that phrase too narrowly, as a ticket to heaven. In the Bible, “eternal life” refers to a quality of life, starting even in this world, so rich in God’s presence, that even death cannot take it away.

Jesus’ answer centers around the Ten Commandments. In his first response, Jesus tellingly omits the First Table of the Law (*Commandments 1-4*), which deal with our love for God. (Perhaps because it’s his interlocutor’s feelings in this regard that first provoked his question.) He omits the Tenth Command as well: “Thou shalt not covet.” Jesus knows that’s where the problem lies. Since our whole economy is based on “coveting,” we need to pay attention!

Please note that Mark specifically tells us that Jesus loved this man (*10: 21*). This is not about condemning a guy just because he’s rich (a kind of reverse snobbery too common today). Nor is it about his jumping through religious hoops! It is about a specific, admittedly radical regimen of spiritual therapy, that this particular soul needed, to advance further in his spiritual life.

Perhaps we don’t need such a radical spiritual rescue measure ourselves. But let’s generalize the lesson, beyond money (what a relief for some of us!): what do *we* worship inordinately (Commands 1-4), compromising *our* faith? Our Rule of Life needs to aim at surrendering every idol to the Lord.

Prayer:

**Lord, we beseech thee, grant thy people grace
to withstand the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil,
and with pure hearts and minds to follow thee the only God;
through Jesus Christ, our Lord.**

(Collect for Trinity XIII, BCP)

Friday in Week Six:

Begin with a time of quiet focusing on God in prayer.

Remember that on Fridays, we may think especially of Christ's death for us.

Then read: **2 Corinthians 9: 1-12.**

In this warm text, St. Paul boasts about the generosity of the Macedonians in supporting his work (we can read about it at *Philippians 4: 10-20*), and urges the Corinthians to stick to their intentions to do the same, and collect a generous contribution for the relief of "the saints," the Christian refugees in Judea. I considered this a great reading with which to conclude our look at the sixth dimension of our *Prayer Book's* Rule of Life. But I also think it is a fitting passage to inspire us to formulate our own personal Rule.

(Some of us may have been invited to do this in preparation for a service of renewal in our discipleship at church. Whether this is so or not for you, you may want to find someone you trust, with whom you can share your Rule, who would be glad to pray with you, and for you, in the months to come.)

On Stewardship Sunday, October 14, 2012 in the Diocese of Fredericton, all incumbents were asked to preach on "The Economy of Blessing". "Economy" or *oikonomia* has now shrunken into a two-dimensional word, about money. It is actually a rich New Testament word, meaning "household". It is sadly too revealing that we now measure our "economy" *only* in financial terms.

Our true "economy" –our true place in the household of God– is about our fulfillment and joy in our relationships with God and others, our delight in living as God's stewards and Christ's disciples in the world, and our progress in becoming all who we are meant to be as God's beloved children. And in that regard, our true economy is a rich, blessed one! For "God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work." (2 Cor. 9: 8). That confidence is the right context for designing a Rule of Life.

Please prepare your personal six-fold Rule of Life, and plan to share it with God in prayer, and with at least one other person in careful accountability. And please, with all God's blessing, now and always... have fun!!

Prayer:

**Almighty and ever-living God, you made us to will and to do
what is acceptable according to your divine purpose:
We pray... that your Holy Spirit always be with us,
and lead us in the knowledge of and obedience to your Word;
So that in your kingdom, we come to receive eternal life,
through our Lord Jesus Christ,
who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns,
One God, for ever and ever!**

*(Adapted from the Bishop's Confirmation Prayer, BCP pages 560-561 and
Book of Common Prayer 2011, Anglican Church in North America, pages 132-133)*

“How to Use this Devotional”

Individuals and parishes may enjoy reading, reflecting and acting upon this invitational devotional for a six-week period, consisting of five readings each week (allowing for a day of “catch-up” and a break on Sunday each week).

*The Spiritual Development Team
has made this devotional resource available
for members and parishes of the Diocese of Fredericton
for use during **Lent**, or the period after **Thanksgiving Sunday**
and leading up to **Christ the King Sunday**
(The Last Sunday after Pentecost: the Reign of Christ).*

*We suggest that attention could be given to
the six elements of the Prayer Book’s Invitation to a Rule of Life
in Sunday Worship during this period, concluding with a corporate offering
and commitment or recommitment to each parishioner’s personal rules on
the **Easter Vigil** (Renewal of Our Baptismal Covenant)
or Easter morning service, or **Christ the King Sunday**
(Last Sunday after Pentecost: the Reign of Christ).*

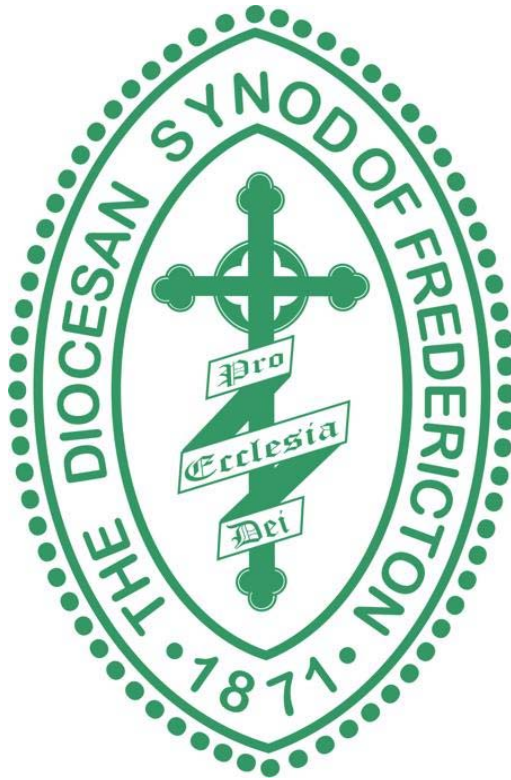
Possible other times for this devotional include:

- Commencing on the First Sunday of Advent, and concluding on the first Sunday after the Epiphany (Observing the Baptism of Jesus);*
- Or commencing on the First Week after Easter, and concluding on the Sunday before Pentecost (or Pentecost itself).*

Further Resources for Daily Prayer & Bible-Reading:

There are many guides for personal daily prayer. One can pray the Morning or Evening Office from the *BCP* in about ten minutes (not including Psalms and Bible readings). The offices in the *BAS* are briefer, though they need to be assembled from different sections. I now have my favourite prayers from both books memorized. Most laypeople may seek something shorter and simpler for daily prayer. Many are inspired by collections in the Celtic style, such as Philipp Newell’s Celtic Prayers from Iona (Wild Goose/Paulist, 1997).

The Prayer Book’s daily lectionary assigns about four chapters of the Bible a day (an Old and New Testament each morning and evening), which would take one through the whole Bible in a year and most of the New Testament twice. The BAS daily lectionary is less ambitious with three shorter readings a day, covering most of the Old Testament in two years, the New Testament each year. The quarterly publication *Forward Day by Day* has commentaries on one of these readings each day. Many other such booklets like *The Upper Room* or *Daily Bread* are also helpful. The Canadian Bible Society prints a yearly leaflet with one reading a day, helpfully supplementing the Sunday lessons. It is printed in the *Anglican Journal* each month.



**Spiritual Development Team
of the Diocesan Council**

**The Diocese of Fredericton
Anglican Church of Canada**

***The Most Rev'd Claude W. Miller
Archbishop of Fredericton and
Metropolitan of the Ecclesiastical Province of Canada***

November 2013